



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

Testimony of Ann Pratt, Executive Director, Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
Before the Education Committee

Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the committee,

On behalf of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide organization whose members consist of public and private early child care providers, Department of Social Service State Funded child care centers, School Readiness Programs, the statewide Head Start Association, Family Resource Centers, Discovery community collaboratives and other state advocacy organizations, we are here today to strongly support S.B. 1106, which would create a Department of Early Education and Child Development.

The evidence is clear and overwhelming. Investing in a strong, coordinated and consolidated early care and education system that will effectively deliver comprehensive, high quality early education to children from birth to 5 makes sense. This message is being heard most recently from the Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Ben Bernanke. In a speech addressing the current trend by state governments to balance state budgets through cutting education, Mr. Bernanke stated "The payoffs of early childhood programs can be especially high.... preschool programs for disadvantaged children have been shown to increase high school graduation rates. Because high school graduates have higher earnings, pay more taxes, and are less likely to use public health programs, investing in such programs can pay off even from the narrow perspective of state budgets; of course, the returns to the overall economy and to the individuals themselves are much greater. "

S.B. 1106 is a gigantic step in maximizing and advancing our current investments in early care and education. We have a number of important programs designed to serve young children, and they do their job very well, but they do it in isolation with no one agency in charge. In fact, these programs are administrated through a patchwork of seven different state agencies with disparate funding streams, disparate reporting requirements and a data system that is not standardized, unified or coordinated. In a study conducted by Holt, Wexler & Farnum it was estimated that approximately \$600 million per year is spent by the state of Connecticut administering to the social, emotional and educational needs of children from birth to age 5. Our state's disorganized approach fails to assure quality standards for thousands of children in early care and education settings. Families and providers frequently must interact with an erratic system of services with multiple agencies, each pursuing its own, sometimes divergent, policies and strategies. This disorganization promotes bureaucracy over effectiveness and frequently uses public funds inefficiently. S.B. 1106 provides us with a badly needed solution to this broken system.

We strongly believe that the creation of a Department of Early Education will consolidate and streamline current services; it will improve program coordination, create urgently needed alignment across the developmental continuum, produce efficiencies by eliminating duplications and it will increase accountability for improving quality and creating the capacity to actually measure the performance of programs as well as effectively asses the progress of the social, emotional and educational success of children from birth to 5.

As you know, this bill calls for the creation of the Department by 2014. We understand and appreciate this timeline, given our current fiscal crisis. However, we strongly recommend that the legislation include

the appointment of a Commissioner of Early Education in 2011 or 2012. We believe the appointment of a Commissioner is essential for the effective planning and coordination that will be required to create a Department that is capable of delivering on its stated goals.

Finally, it is our belief that the appointment of a Commissioner of Early Education will provide the leadership needed to improve and advance Connecticut's competitiveness for federal funds that could become available in 2012. Last week Secretary Arne Duncan reiterated the administration commitment to create the Early Learning Challenge Grant, a competitive grant program that will require states to have a Quality Improvement Rating System in place, and/or at the very least pilots, as well as a coordinated data collection system. For Connecticut to be competitive for these funds, we will need to significantly advance these two crucial initiatives. A newly appointed Commissioner of Early Education will be able to provide leadership and commitment to effectively accomplish these initiatives for Connecticut.